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ABSTRACT

Theories of development in childhood maintain that equality plays an important role in peer interactions during middle childhood. One particular situation that can provoke problems is the request for help. Helping is not an easy situation because an individual's need for something creates an imbalance which children try to avoid. This study investigated whether help was more frequently given or offered in a sensitive and respectful way when children either were friends or demonstrated a balanced relationship between the extent of both partners' mutual help. Videotapes of sixth-graders' spontaneous interactions in the classroom were analyzed. One hundred and thirty-four helping acts were identified and rated according to the type and quality of helping. Children were also interviewed about their relationships with their classmates. Findings indicated that reciprocal friends demonstrated a more balanced account of mutual helping and manifested adverse behaviors less often than non-friend dyads. Adverse behaviors among friends appeared to be related to rivalry or competition and not to imbalanced helping accounts. Findings raised the issue of the ways in which children's behaviors reveal a rational reaction to the situation and where they appear to be influenced by equilibrium or disequilibrium of the partners' input into mutual assistance. (SD)

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HELPING, FRIENDSHIP, AND CHILDREN'S BALANCE OF GIVE AND TAKE

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Paper presented at the Biennial Meeting of the Society for Research in Child Development (SRCD), Albuquerque, New Mexico/USA, April 15-18, 1999.

Symposium: Equities and inequities in children's peer relationships

Talk 4: Helping, friendship, and children's balance of give and take

Many theories of development in childhood maintain that equality plays an important role in peer interactions during middle childhood. Children consider themselves peers when they regard each other as equals of rank (Hartup 1983) or engage in activities involving similar levels of behavioral complexity (Lewis & Rosenblum, 1975). Generally speaking, children resist domination during peer interactions, demand that each should have a chance to state his or her intention, insist that each should contribute in an equal way to joint undertakings and not exploit others, and maintain that any unfair advantages should be re-distributed in a balanced way. At the same time, children often attempt to gain the upper hand, enforce their plans, or gain the best share. Also, peer groups often deny equal status to others in the classroom. Thus, it remains unclear whether children really aim at equality, or whether they use the claim for equality as a strategic means to improve an underprivileged position. Astonishingly, little research is conducted that addresses these questions.

One particular situation that can provoke problems is the request for help. Helping is not an easy situation because an individual's need for something that another may give or deny creates an imbalance that children try to avoid. The possessor of what is needed may dictate the conditions of helping, may admonish or blame the help-seeking child for carelessness, and exploit the situation to his/her advantage. Many unfriendly behaviors have been observed when children ask other children for help or offer assistance (Krappmann & Oswald, 1991). Are these behaviors related to an imbalance that is generated by the asymmetry between the child requesting support and the child who possesses what is needed?

We investigated whether help was more frequently given or offered in a sensitive and respectful way when children were either friends (based on reciprocal nomination) or demonstrated a balanced relation between the extent of both partners' mutual help. Videotapes of sixth-graders' spontaneous interactions in the classroom (n = 21 boys and girls; mean age = 12; 5 years) were analyzed. 134 helping acts were identified and rated according to the type and

quality of helping. Children were also interviewed about their relationships with their classmates.

Approximately one third of the helping acts were accompanied by adverse behaviors (i.e., admonitions, derogations, or refusals). 73 percent of the adverse behaviors occurred in dyads of non-friends and were significantly related to imbalances of give and take within these dyads. In contrast, reciprocal friends demonstrated a more balanced account of mutual helping and less often manifested adverse behaviors than non-friend dyads. Adverse behaviors among friends appear to be related to rivalry or competition and not to imbalanced helping accounts.

The ways in which children's behaviors reveal a rational reaction to the situation and whether they appear to be influenced by equilibria or disequilibria of the partners' input into mutual assistance is discussed. Whether conclusions about children's demands for equality can be drawn from these observations are also considered.

Petra Zornemann, Lothar Krappmann, Birgit Grabow, Hans Oswald

Helping, Friendship, and Children's Balance of Give and Take

General problem

Relationships among peers in childhood are regarded as relationships between partners of equal rank, who share preferences for particular activities in which they engage on similar levels of behavioral complexities (Hartup, 1983; Lewis & Rosenblum, 1975). Observations show that children resist domination during peer interactions, demand that each should have a chance to state his or her intentions, insist that each should contribute in equal ways to joint undertakings and not exploit others, and maintain that unjust advantage should be re-distributed in a balanced manner. This emphasis on equality excited the interest of developmental researchers because peers obviously generate a context of interaction, negotiation and decision making for each other that clearly differs from the asymmetric social situation that emerges between parents (or other adults) and children (Youniss, 1980).

The term peer often became so closely associated with equality that we tend to disregard that also opposing behavioral inclinations are apparent among peers: Children frequently attempt to gain the upper hand, enforce their plans, or try to obtain the best share. Also, peer groups often deny equal status to marginal members or to others in the classroom. Quite a nummber of observations foster an impression that children mainly use the claim for equality as a strategic means applied to improve their own position. Thus, it remains unclear whether children really aim at equality as a guiding principle when advantages and dis-

advantages are met, opporunities and risks shared, or gains and losses distributed.

Another reason may additionally contribute to the overemphasis that is placed on the manifestations of equality compared to the attention that is given to phenomena of inequality. Equality is a high value in the adult society. Efforts of realizing equality seem to indicate that children are proceding to a more advanced developmental stage; violations of equality, therefore, are judged as a demonstration of immature behaviors that have to be overcome by developmental progress and prosocial education.

In this paper, we will propose the hypothesis that both the effort to realize equality among peers as well as the experience that norms of equality are violated may contribute to social development. We do not have the longitudinal data needed for clear evidence, but can analyze functions and consequences of behaviors that emerge when children are confronted with the request of help by a peer. Children at the age of ten to twelve years have many difficulties to come to terms with these requests (see Krappmann & Oswald, 1991).

In this paper, we will show

- that children in middle childhood struggle with the positional inequaliy apparent in the situation of need and help.

We will examine

- whether friends can more easily ignore or overcome the aspects of inequality inherent in this situation than non-friends, and
- whether the balance or imbalance of give and take in dyads is related to the manner of helping each other.

Insert Overhead 1

Method

Data about helping among children was obtained from two studies in which better understanding of children's behaviors in natural settings was intended. The first study was a participant observation study in three classrooms of grade 4; the 87 students, 42 girls and 45 boys, were about ten years old. Observers took notes on the peer interactions of all children attending the classroom. Each child was in the focus of attention for about three class periods. After the comprehensive narrative protocols about children's social lives in the classroom were elaborated, helping interactions were searched and identified based on a manual specifying which situations were regarded as help. The narrative protocols contained 453 helping interactions.

In the second study peer interactions in one classroom of grade 6 were videotaped; the 20 students, 11 girls and 9 boys, were about 12;5 years old. Each child was in the focus of the video-recorder for about two class periods. Helping situations were identified in the same way as in study 1. The 134 helping situations found were transcribed in order to facilitate analyses. The analyses concentrated not only on the facts whether help was given or denied, but in particular on the ways in which help was asked for, was given or denied, and recipients reacted to the help given or denied.

All students of the classrooms included in the study were interviewed about their social relationships to classmates.

Results and comments

Insert Overhead 2

The main categorizations that were applied in the analysis of the help situations were

- help was requested or unsolicited;
- it was given or denied;
- it was accepted or rejected.

Further, the manner in which the child who was asked for help reacted to the request, was divided into the categories "unproblematic", i.e. help was given without a disadvantage of the child requiring help, and "problematic", i.e. the help was given or denied under unfavorable conditions for the child in need. Also the behaviors of the child receiving help were divided into the categories "unproblematic" and "problematic". The category "unproblematic" comprises behaviors of the child requesting help that contained no disadvantage for the child asked for help; the category "problematic" comprises behaviors of the child requesting help that were unfavorable for the child addressed. Thus, we distinguish between

- "unproblematic" and "problematic" procedures of children.

Insert Overhead 3

First, I will give you an overview over the aspects of helping which were differentiated. In approximately one half of 453 helping situations in the grade-4 classrooms and in about two thirds of 134 helping situations in the grade-6 classroom the help was requested. In the remaining cases help was offered unsolicited. In about one third of the cases in grade 4 and and about one fifth of the cases in grade 6 in which help was requested, help was not given. Unsolicited help was mostly accepted. Anyhow, in 23 percent of the cases in grade 4 and in 15 percent of the cases in grade 6 it was rejected.

In some of the cases, in which help was denied, good reasons were given. In the vast majority of cases, however, the refusal

of help was accompanied by unfriendly or humiliating remarks, adverse actions, or hostile ignoring the request. These were the behaviors categorized as "problematic". When a child, to whom help was offered without a request, rejected the help offered, this rejection was sometimes explained in an objective manner. In other cases the child interpreted such help as unnecessary or intrusive and mostly expressed his or her interpretation by repugnant words and unfriendly actions. Also these behaviors were regarded as "problematic".

But not only in the cases of help that was not given by a potential helper, or of help that was rejected by a child to whom help was offered, unfriendly remarks and attacks were frequent. Those problematic behaviors also occurred in situations in which help was requested and given or offered and accepted. Often the helper did not just simply give the help needed and the recipient just accepted the help. Also in these situations the child giving or offering help as well as the child receiving and accepting help, often blamed and harmed the other child or they mutually humiliated and attacked each other.

Insert overhead 4

Overall in about one fourth of all helping situations found on both grade levels the behaviors of children asked for help or offering help was categorized as "problematic". In the classrooms of grade 4 the behaviors of the child in need for help, were categorized as "problematic" in almost the same percentage of cases. The older children of grade 6, however, mostly reacted without problematic aspects to help which was offered to them.

Since the problematic behaviors often were not a reaction to problematic behaviors of the other, the problematic acts sum up to 41 percent of all helping situations in the grade-4 class-

rooms and to 33 percent of all helping situations in the grade-6 classroom.

We have good reason to believe that the high percentage of blaming, insulting, humiliating, and attacking a child in need or a helper is not a result of a biased selection of classrooms, since these classrooms were attended by children from upper-lower and middle-class families living in normal neighborhoods. Our analyses also reveal that almost all children manifested these problematic behaviors, though to a different extent. Also children of high social competence who are well intergrated in peer relationships, reacted in the described ways. Gender differences in general were insignificant. The analyses show that a domain conventionally regarded as an area of prosocial behavior stimulates quite a number of conflicts.

Our explanation is that the act of helping itself creates a relationship between the potential helper and the petitioner which places them in unequal positions. Children addressed for help possess something the other child wants. Therefore, they are able to dominate the interaction by controlling the desired resource. Correspondingly, children in need fear to be in an inferior position and to be overcharged for the help given. Observations that in many instances domination and humiliation as well as strategies in defense against these risks occur "without reasons", i.e. without a preceding violation of a norm or a standard, draw our attention to the structural asymmetry that characterizes the helping situation. We presume that children have to come to terms with the structural asymmetry generated by the request for help as well as by the offer to give help. The situation presents opportunities of dominating the other who became dependent on support, but also stimulates efforts of insisting on equality which were demonstrated by preventive measures and attacks on the helper who could try to dominate and exploit the situation.

If this presumption is right, the problematic reactions should be less frequent in situations in which children must be less inclined to dominate and exploit or less afraid of being dominated and exploited. When children are in a continued relationship, there should be chances for compensating the imbalance that emerges in one situation, by reverse actions in the future when the other will expect a favor or will be in some need.

We therefore examined, whether problematic behaviors were less frequent when help was requested or offered among friends. Our analyses show that friendship matters among boys, but not among

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Insert overhead 5 and 6

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girls. While boys more often reacted in unproblematic ways when help was at issue within a friendship, girls did not make a difference with regard to the relationship between helper and child in need. This result was confirmed for children of both grade levels, i.e. for the ten-year olds as well as for the twelve-year olds.

A further assumption was that the problematic behaviors of helper and helped child are a reaction to an imbalance of give and take between the two children. A correlation between the balance of give and take help characterizing a dyad and the unproblematic manner of dealing with the help issue could not be discovered. When we, however, located the dyads in a coordinate system that combined the dimensions "extent of balancedness" and the dimension "portion of problematic behaviors", we discovered that the dyads cluster together forming three groups which can be interpreted as types.

Insert overhead 7

About 20 percent of the dyads were characterized by a rather extreme asymmetry with regard to giving and taking help. Almost always one member of the dyad received help from the other, yet help was constantly given in a friendly and generous way. These dyads were one-sided altruistic dyads (Type 1).

There was a second, less numerous type of dyads in which the members also did not consider the balance of give and take. In these dyads both partners gave and received help to more or less the same extent. Yet the partners attacked, humiliated, and insulted each other mutually in most of the helping situations. Both these types of dyads destroyed the expected correlation between the balance of give and take and the problematic or unproblematic manner of dealing with help.

The third type of dyads confirmed our hypothesis about a correlation between the balancedness of give and take and the friendliness of helping. We call them "calculating" dyads, because they seem to evaluate the past experience. The more both partners contributed to mutual help in an equal way, the more they behaved in an unproblematic way toward each other. About three quarters of the children followed this calculating pattern.

Insert overhead 8

When we compare the findings for the grade-4 classrooms and the grade-6 classroom, we see that the type 1 dyads, the altruistic dyads, were more frequent among the older children than among the younger in grade 4. The conflicting dyads, type 2, could not be found in grade 6. At both ages the majority of children belonged to type 3 whose members demonstrated more unproblematic helping behaviors when giving and receiving help in the dyad was well balanced. The correlation between balancedness and unproblematic helping in type-3 dyads was .46 among the ten-year olds and .42 among the twelve-year olds.

The unfriendly, adverse, and even hostile behaviors in the unbalanced dyads can be interpreted as reactions against asymmetry and apparently are not just irrational or antisocial acts, but are - so the hypothesis which needs further investigation - a reasonable reaction to an interaction structure which deserves alteration or termination. The behaviors of these children can be understood as confirming the conception that also or just these unfriendly peer interactions contain incentives which promote effective help without humiliation and exploitation. Since balancedness of help in dyads and friendhip are connected in boys' dyads, there are also hints at privileged chances of development in close relationships.

The disappearance of the conflict-dyad type and the increase of the altruistic-dyad type between grade 4 and grade 6 point at a developmental dynamic. Only a longitudinal study can demonstrate which developmental pathways exist that are based on challenges of asymmetry and efforts to reach more equality.

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Overhead 1

Study I: Participant observations in the classroom

3 fourth-grade classrooms
87 children:
42 girls, 45 boys
mean age: 9;11 years

Narrative protocols (three class sessions of each child)

453 helping interactions

Interviews with children (to rate their relationships)

Study II: Videotaped observations in the classroom

1 sixth-grade classroom
21 children:
12 girls, 9 boys
mean age: 12;5 years

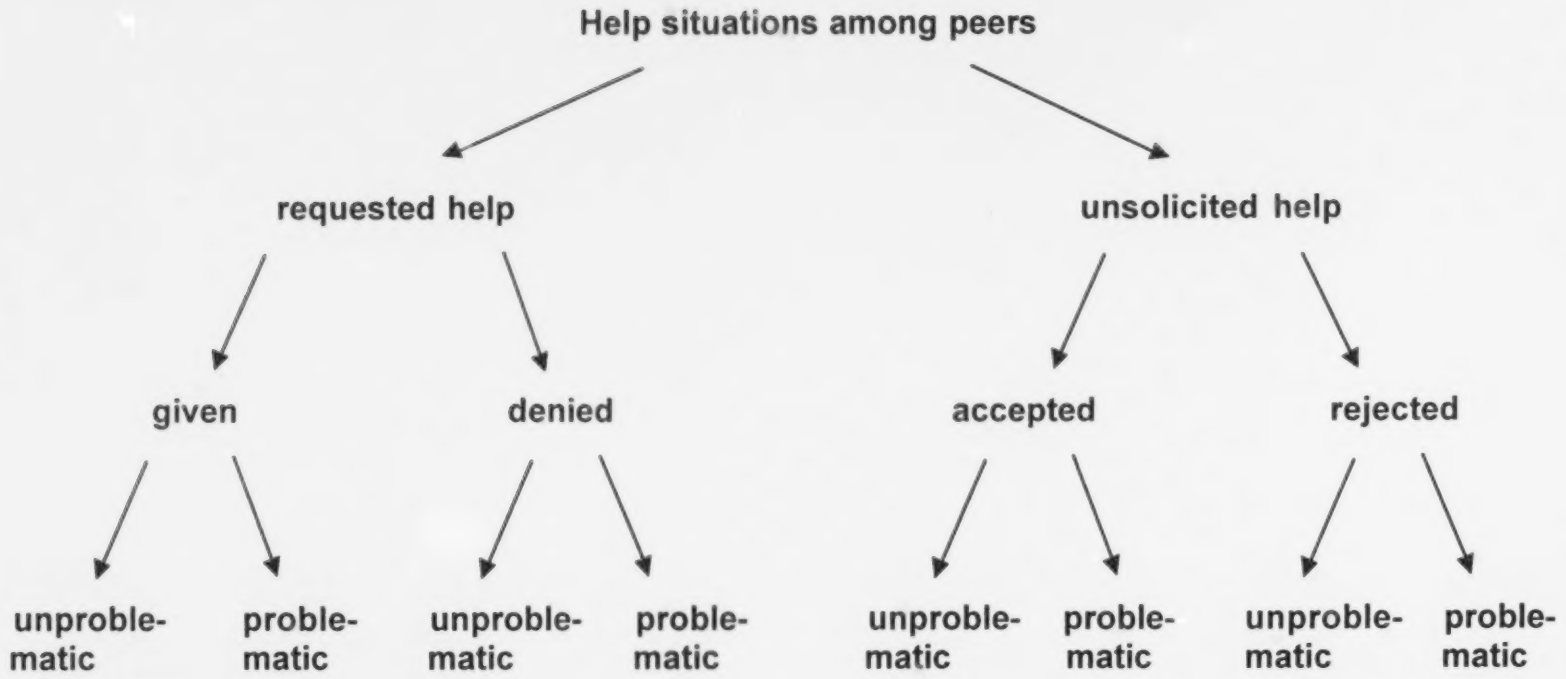
Videotapes (two class sessions of each child)

134 transcribed helping interactions

Interviews with children (to rate their relationships)

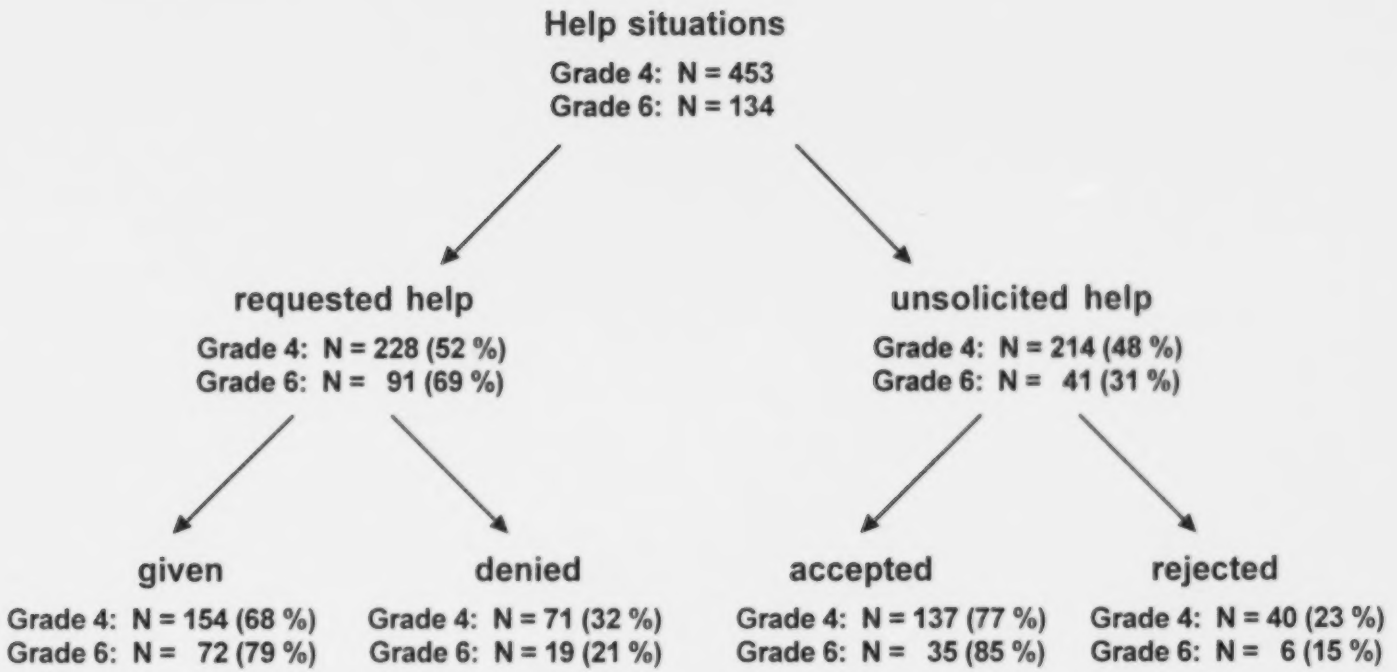
Overhead 2

Categories of helping



Overhead 3

Categories of helping


Help situations
Grade 4: N = 453
Grade 6: N = 134
requested help
Grade 4: N = 228 (52 %)
Grade 6: N = 91 (69 %)
unsolicited help
Grade 4: N = 214 (48 %)
Grade 6: N = 41 (31 %)
given
Grade 4: N = 154 (68 %)
Grade 6: N = 72 (79 %)
denied
Grade 4: N = 71 (32 %)
Grade 6: N = 19 (21 %)
accepted
Grade 4: N = 137 (77 %)
Grade 6: N = 35 (85 %)
rejected
Grade 4: N = 40 (23 %)
Grade 6: N = 6 (15 %)

Note: Because of missing information, some situations could not be assigned to the categories.

Overhead 4

Unproblematic and problematic helping

	Grade 4		Grade 6	
	%	N	%	N
Helpers' behavior problematic	27	121	23	31
Helpers' behavior unproblematic	73	330	77	103
	100	451	100	134
Receiver's behavior problematic	25	108	11	15
Receiver's behavior unproblematic	75	330	89	119
	100	438	100	134
At least one party's behavior problematic	41	178	33	44
No party's behavior unproblematic	59	258	67	90
	100	436	100	134

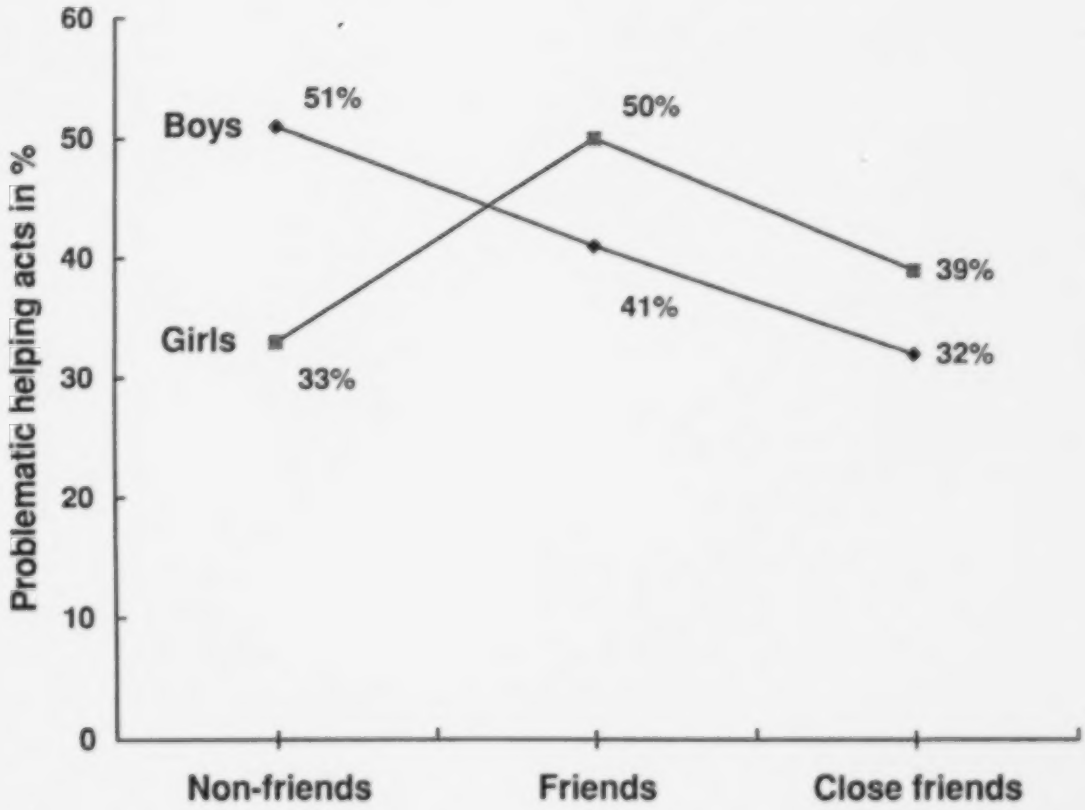
Note: Because of missing information, some situations could not be assigned to the categories.

Overhead 5

Problematic helping and friendship

(Same-sex interactions only; at least one party's behavior problematic)

Fourth grade
(n = 324)



boys $chi^2 = 4.54$ $p < .10$
girls $chi^2 = 1.86$ n.s.

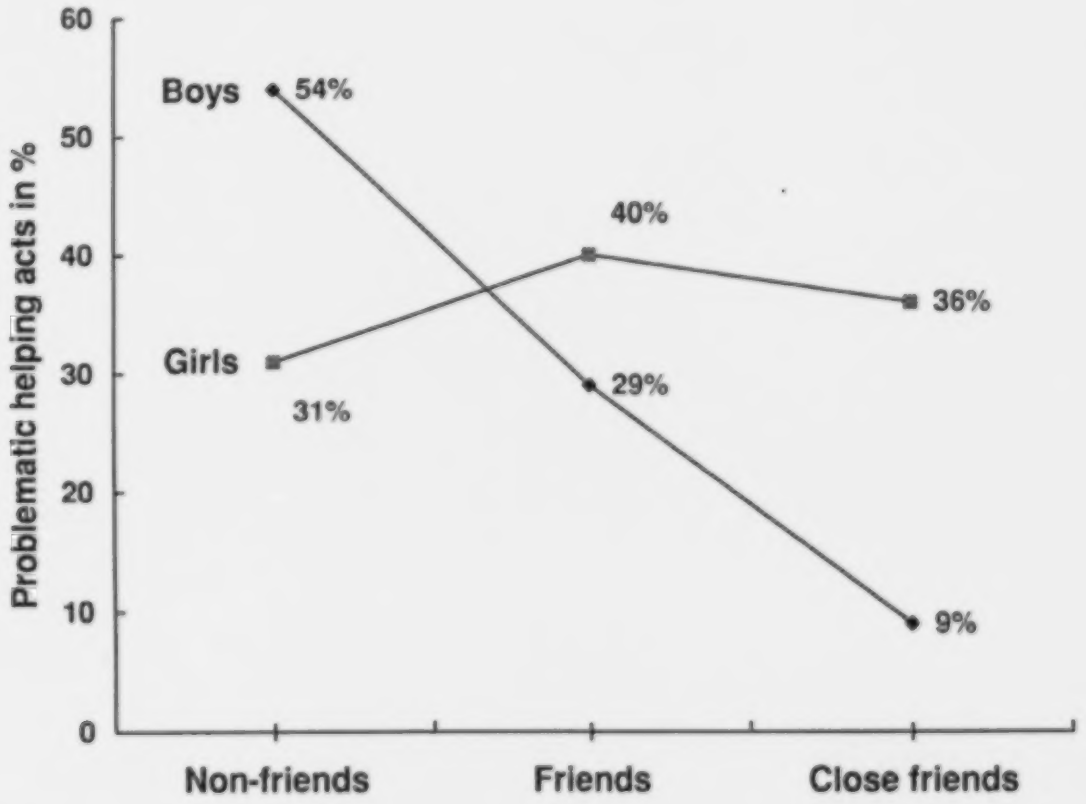
friends vs non-friends: boys $chi^2 = 4.05$ $p < .05$
girls $chi^2 = 1.20$ n.s.

Overhead 6

Problematic helping and friendship

(Same-sex interactions only; at least one party's behavior problematic)

Sixth grade
(n = 107)

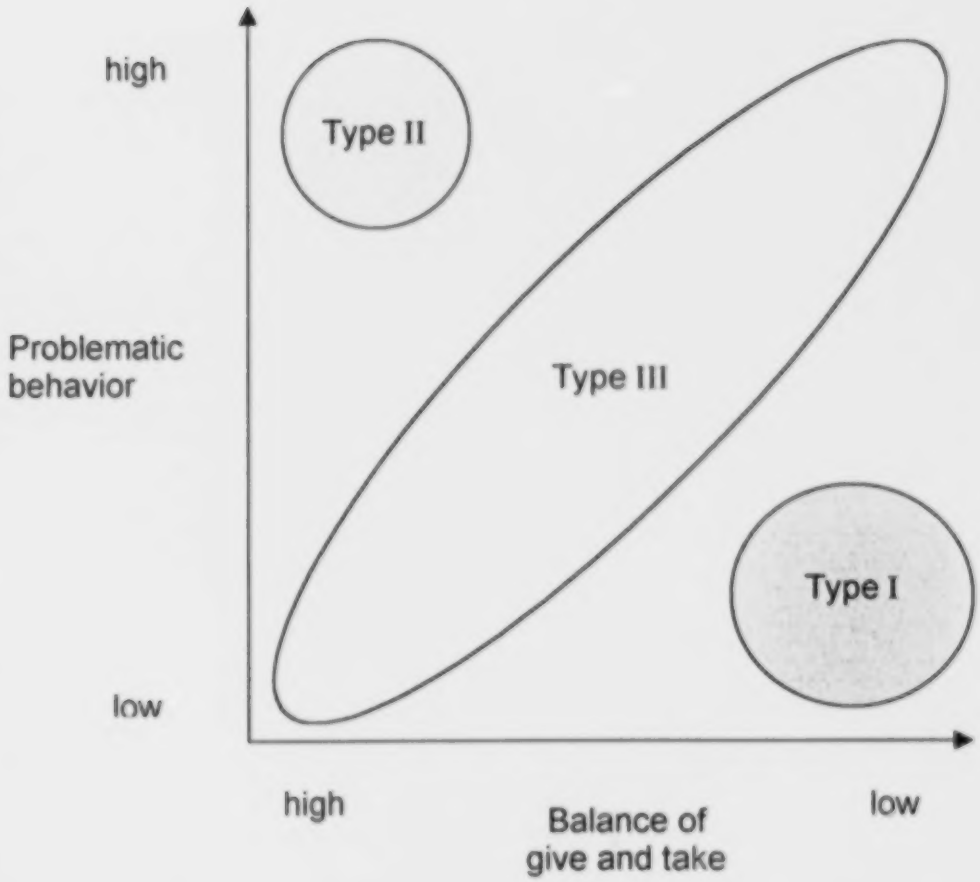


boys $chi^2 = 5.52$ $p < .10$
girls $chi^2 = 0.38$ n.s.

friends vs non-friends: boys $chi^2 = 4.77$ $p < .05$
girls $chi^2 = 0.34$ n.s.

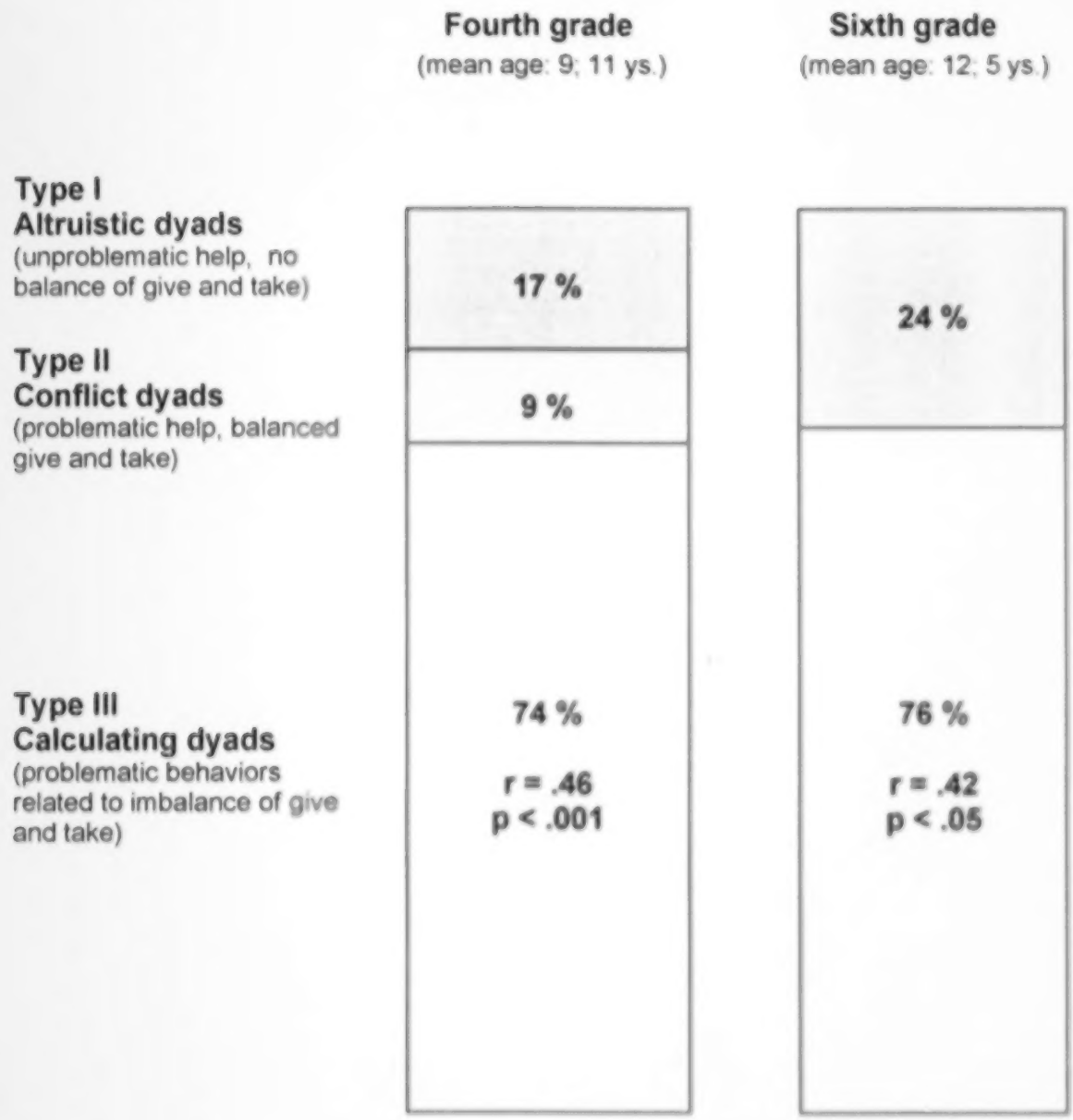
Overhead 7

Helping and the balance of give and take



Overhead 8

Types of dyads according to grade level



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